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✓ Latest release

Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG)

This release of the ASCCEG (2019) contains the updated classification following a limited review

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Overview

About the classification

The ASCCEG is the Australian statistical standard for classifying cultural and ethnic groups. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) endorses the use of this classification for collecting, aggregating and disseminating data relating to the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Australian population. Use of the ASCCEG by statistical, administrative and service delivery agencies improves the comparability and compatibility of data about ethnicity collected from different sources.

The ABS published the first edition of the ASCCEG in October 2000. A second edition was

published in 2005 and revisions to the second edition were published in 2011, 2016 and 2019.

The identification of cultural and ethnic groups in the classification, and the way in which they are grouped, does not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the ABS regarding the recognition of any group by governments, organisations or individuals, or the status accorded them. Nor does it imply the expression of any opinion concerning the relative merit or importance of particular cultural and ethnic groups or the peoples who belong to them.

Ethnicity

The words 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic' are associated with many different meanings. For the purposes of the ASCCEG, 'ethnicity' refers to the shared identity or similarity of a group of people on the basis of one or more distinguishing characteristics.

These characteristics include:

- A long shared history, the memory of which is kept alive.
- A cultural tradition, including family and social customs, sometimes religiously based.
- A common geographic origin.
- A common language (but not necessarily limited to that group).
- A common literature (written or oral).
- A common religion.
- Being a minority (often with a sense of being oppressed).
- Being racially conspicuous.

The description of ethnicity and distinguishing characteristics were established in the report of the 1986 Population Census Ethnicity Committee, chaired by the late Professor W.D. Borrie CBE (published in ABS cat. no. 2172.0 - The Measurement of Ethnicity in the Australian Census of Population and Housing) (the Borrie Report). The key factor for the inclusion of an ethnic group is the group regarding itself and being regarded by others, as a distinct community by virtue of certain characteristics, not all of which have to be present in the case of each ethnic group.

Self-perceived group identification has influenced the content of the ASCCEG more so than historical origins. Cultural and ethnic groups are included to enable:

- Measurement of the extent to which individuals associate with particular groups. Measuring active association produces data for groups which is useful for policy and service delivery needs. This means a number of categories that equate to national

cultural identities are included, for example, Australian. A stronger emphasis on historical origins would have resulted in data for more groups with which individuals may have no or little social, cultural or economic affinity.

- The recommended method of collecting ethnicity or ancestry statistics in the ABS and other organisations. It is a self-assessed response to a direct question. No attempt is made to historically determine the origins of individuals.

Considering ethnicity as a multi-dimensional concept based on a number of distinguishing characteristics using a self-perception approach allows for a practical and useful classification attuned to a concept of what constitutes ethnicity and cultural identity. This approach supports the collection and use of data in statistical, administrative and service delivery settings.

Since the Borrie Report was published, the multicultural nature of Australian society has further developed but the approach to the definition of ethnicity in the report is still relevant and serves the purposes of the ASCCEG.

Scope of the classification

The scope of the ASCCEG is all cultural and ethnic groups in the world as defined above. In practice, only those cultural and ethnic groups with significant numbers of persons resident in Australia are separately identified in the classification. Those groups not separately identified are included in the most appropriate residual (not elsewhere classified) category of the classification. Residual categories are explained in 'About Codes'.

The code structure of the classification allows for the addition of cultural and ethnic groups, as needed.

The classification is not intended to classify people, but rather to classify all claims of association or identification with a cultural or ethnic group.

Building the classification

Classification structure

The ASCCEG has a three level hierarchical structure that consists of broad groups, narrow groups, and cultural and ethnic groups.

Broad group

- This is the highest level of the classification.
- There are nine broad groups.

- Each one contains between two and five narrow groups.

Narrow group

- This is the second or middle level of the classification.
- There are 28 narrow groups.
- Each one contains between one and 33 cultural and ethnic groups.

Cultural and ethnic group

- This is the base and most detailed level of the classification.
- There are 278 cultural and ethnic groups, including 24 residual ('not elsewhere classified') categories. Residual categories are explained in 'About codes'.

Example

Broad group, 7 Southern and Central Asian

Narrow group, 71 Southern Asian

Cultural and ethnic group, 7101 Anglo-Indian

Classification criteria

The classification criteria are the principles by which the base level categories of the classification are formed and then aggregated to form broader or higher-level categories in the classification's hierarchical structure.

Two classification criteria are used in the ASCCEG to form the three hierarchical levels:

- Geographic proximity of cultural and ethnic groups. It is the geographic area of the world in which a cultural or ethnic group first became, or was first recognised as, a distinct entity.
- Similar social and cultural characteristics. These include the characteristics described in the 'Overview, Ethnicity'. The primary characteristics of similarity used to form and aggregate cultural and ethnic groups are language spoken and religion practised. Other characteristics considered are family and social customs, national identities, and historical links. Characteristics such as food, music and art traditions also serve as indicators of cultural and social similarity.

The classification criteria have been applied to aggregate:

- Cultural and ethnic groups to form narrow groups on the basis of geographic proximity and similarity of cultural and social characteristics.
- Narrow groups to form broad groups on the basis of geographic proximity and a degree of similarity of cultural and social characteristics.

Noteworthy classificatory decisions

The cultural identities of the peoples of Australia are recognised within the ASCCEG. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are recognised with appropriate categories in the narrow group 'Australian Peoples' and since European settlement, a distinct Australian cultural identity has emerged prompting the inclusion of 'Australian' in that narrow group.

Cultural and ethnic group 3308 'Russian' has been classified in Broad Group 3 'Southern and Eastern European' on the grounds of cultural similarity with other European cultural and ethnic groups even though much of Russia lies geographically in Asia. As a general rule, cultural and ethnic groups which originated and are located in Russia have also been classified to Europe. It is acknowledged that this is not necessarily the best solution for all cultural and ethnic groups east of the Urals, many of whom are more culturally Asian than European. The principle that has been adopted for the classification of groups in Russia east of the Urals is that those which speak Altaic or Iranic languages are classified to Narrow Group 72 Central Asian, while those which speak Ugro-Finnic languages are classified to Narrow Group 33 Eastern European.

Jewish has been included in Broad Group 4 'North African and Middle Eastern'. It is acknowledged that many Jewish people in Australia might not have ties with the Middle East and might consider classification within one of the European broad groups as more correct. However, following consultation with representatives of the Jewish community at the time the ASCCEG was developed, it was decided to adhere to the classification criterion for geographic proximity and include 'Jewish' in 'North African and Middle Eastern' as this is where the Jewish culture originated.

Many people relate to more than one cultural or ethnic group and will give a multiple response to a question on ancestry, ethnicity or cultural identity. Often a response will indicate an identification with a country in a national or cultural sense and will also acknowledge continuing ties with other ethnic or cultural groups, for example, Irish Australian, Italian Australian. Data collection models should be developed to capture multiple responses to enhance usefulness of the output.

Design constraints

The ASCCEG is primarily a classification for collecting statistical data within the Australian context.

Theoretical and conceptual considerations for developing the ASCCEG were constrained by the need to ensure the:

- Practical usefulness of the classification for collecting ancestry data from both statistical and administrative sources in Australia.

- Analytical usefulness of data collected within the framework of the classification.
- Number of Australians identifying with cultural and ethnic groups within each category at each level of the classification.
- Identification of groups which could be significant for policy setting and service delivery purposes.

The effect of these constraints on the classification has been that:

- Some cultural and ethnic groups which are significant in a world context are not separately identified in the structure.
- Cultural and ethnic groups which are not separately identified are included in the most appropriate residual or not elsewhere classified (nec) category.
- Some broad groups are limited in the number of narrow groups they subsume.

The classification can accommodate changes to Australia's cultural and ethnic composition and can be used to facilitate comparisons with cultural and ethnicity data from other countries.

About codes

Standard code scheme

- Broad groups are represented by one-digit codes.
- Narrow groups are represented by two-digit codes. The first digit represents the parent broad group code and the second digit represents the sequence of narrow groups within the parent broad group.
- Cultural and ethnic groups are represented by four-digit codes. The first two digits represent the parent narrow group code and the final two digits represent the sequence of cultural and ethnic groups within a narrow group. The sequence is alphabetical order with the exception of residual 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) categories or where new groups have been added following reviews of the classification.
- Cultural and ethnic groups do not have codes ending with '0' or '9' because these codes have specific functions within the code scheme.

Example of the categories in the 'Oceanian' broad group:

Broad group	Narrow group	Cultural and ethnic group
1 OCEANIAN		
	11 Australian Peoples	1101 Australian 1102 Australian Aboriginal 1103 Australian South Sea Islander 1104 Torres Strait Islander 1105 Norfolk Islander
	12 New Zealand Peoples	1201 Maori 1202 New Zealander
	13 Melanesian and Papuan	1301 New Caledonian 1302 Ni-Vanuatu 1303 Papua New Guinean 1304 Solomon Islander 1399 Melanesian and Papuan, nec
	14 Micronesian	1401 I-Kiribati 1402 Nauruan 1499 Micronesian, nec
	15 Polynesian	1501 Cook Islander 1502 Fijian 1503 Niuean 1504 Samoan 1505 Tongan 1506 Hawaiian 1507 Tahitian 1508 Tokelauan 1511 Tuvaluan 1512 Pitcairn 1599 Polynesian, nec

Residual 'nec' categories

Residual or 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) categories capture cultural and ethnic groups that are not separately identified in the main structure of the classification due to their low statistical significance. These categories are represented by four digit codes where the first two digits identify the narrow group to which they relate and the final two digits are '99'. The classification currently has 24 'nec' categories.

'NEC' codes are part of the main structure of the Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG).

Residual 'Other' narrow groups

In some broad groups, codes are reserved for residual categories at the narrow group level.

- Codes start with the broad group code and end with '9'.
- Titles commence with 'Other'.
- They include separately identified cultural and ethnic groups which do not fit into substantive narrow groups on the basis of the classification criteria.
- There are two of these groups in the classification - '49 Other North African and Middle

Eastern' and '69 Other North-East Asian'.

Supplementary codes

Supplementary or 'not further defined' (nfd) codes are used to code responses that are insufficiently specific for the main classification structure to be used. They exist only for operational reasons. No data would be coded to them if sufficiently detailed responses were obtained in all instances.

Using supplementary codes enables responses or input data which can only be assigned codes at the broad or narrow group levels of the classification to be processed within a collection at the four digit level. The coding process can be as precise as the input data quality allows, preserving data that would otherwise be discarded as uncodable or aggregated with other data to which it is unrelated in the 'inadequately described' supplementary category.

Supplementary codes are not part of the classification structure. They are listed separately in Table 2 of the ASCCEG data cube (accessible from the Data downloads section).

There are three types of supplementary codes:

Supplementary 'nfd' codes ending with zeros

- Four-digit codes ending in zeros are known as 'not further defined' (nfd) codes.
- They are used to code responses which do not contain sufficient information to be accurately coded to a substantive (four digit) cultural or ethnic group but which can be coded to a higher level (broad or narrow group) of the classification structure.

Examples:

- The response 'Scandinavian' does not contain sufficient information to be coded directly to a substantive cultural and ethnic group, but it can be coded to narrow group '24 Northern European' which covers all the cultural and ethnic groups that are encompassed by the term 'Scandinavian'. It is allocated the 'nfd' code '2400 Northern European, nfd'.
- The response 'Celtic' does not contain sufficient information to be coded directly to a cultural or ethnic group or narrow group, but it can be coded to broad group '2 North-West European' as all Celtic cultural and ethnic groups originated and developed in North-West Europe. It is allocated the 'nfd' code '2000 North-West European, nfd'.

Supplementary codes commencing with zeros

- Four-digit codes commencing with '000' enable coding of responses that cannot be coded to any category in the ASCCEG.
- There are two supplementary codes of this kind: '0000 Inadequately described' and '0001

Not stated'.

Supplementary codes commencing with '09'

Four digit codes commencing with '09' are used to code ancestry responses which broadly describe the region of origin but cannot be coded to either a substantive cultural or ethnic group or to one of the 'nfd' codes. These codes allow the collection and storage of data for responses such as African, Asian, and European.

Index for coding responses

Coding non-standard responses

Responses provided in statistical and administrative collections do not always reflect formal names of categories in the Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG). For example, Sicilian may be a response to a question about ancestry but it does not exactly match the title of the category '3103 Italian'. A coding index is therefore necessary to act as a link between responses and the classification.

The accurate coding of ancestry responses within Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collections is carried out by automated coding systems that link high-frequency responses to their corresponding categories in the ASCCEG via a coding index. These automatic coding systems are based upon the information contained in the ASCCEG coding index.

ASCCEG coding index

The ASCCEG coding index connects more than one thousand high-frequency ancestry responses to each of their corresponding cultural and ethnic groups within the ASCCEG, enabling responses to be assigned accurately and quickly to the appropriate category of the classification. The index includes:

- formal ancestry titles
- contemporary and traditional titles
- spelling variations and misspellings
- high-frequency responses identified in statistical surveys and in the Census of Population and Housing.

Classification codes for particular responses have been allocated by reference to literature in the field and consultation with academics, government and private organisations with relevant knowledge and expertise; and by analysis of ABS data. In addition to its coding function, the index can be used to clarify the nature, extent and varietal content of each classification category.

The ASCCEG coding index may be requested by contacting standards@abs.gov.au (<mailto:standards@abs.gov.au>).

Coding rules

The following coding rules outline the parameters used to build the entries in the coding index:

- Responses which match exactly with an entry in the coding index are assigned the code allocated to that index entry.
- Responses which have a partial match with an entry in the coding index and only differ in terms of spelling, use of abbreviations or acronyms, are assigned the code allocated to that index entry.
- Responses which have a partial match with an entry in the coding index and only differ in terms of qualifying or extraneous words are assigned the code allocated to that index entry.
- Responses which do not match with an index entry or do not relate to a separately identified cultural and ethnic group in the classification are assigned a residual (nec) category code, or a supplementary (nfd) code.
- Responses which are not precise enough to be coded to any category should be assigned the 'Inadequately described' supplementary code.
- When coding what appear to be multiple responses, if all the words appearing in the response are contained in a single index entry, assign the code allocated to that index entry.
- When coding what appear to be multiple responses, if all the words appearing in a response are not contained in a single index entry, assign a code for each word representing a cultural or ethnic group that does appear in the index.

The coding rules outlined above can also be used as a guide for coding responses that are not covered by the coding index.

Using the classification

Editing specifications

The full range of Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG) codes should be used in all stages of statistical production including validating input codes at the editing stage of data processing, aggregating data to higher levels of the classification's structure, and deriving output items.

The valid range of codes consists of:

- All codes in the main structure of the classification.

- All codes in the 'Supplementary codes' list.

The valid range of codes are shown in Tables 1.3 and 2 of the ASCCEG data cube (accessible from the Data downloads section).

Coding, storage and presentation of data

Data should be coded and stored at the most detailed (four digit) level of the classification. Collecting and storing data at the four-digit level of the classification allows the greatest flexibility for the output of statistical data, enables more detailed and complex analyses, and facilitates comparisons with other data sets.

The hierarchical structure of the ASCCEG allows users the flexibility to present statistics at the level of the classification which suits their purpose(s). Data can be output at broad group, narrow group or cultural and ethnic group levels of the classification. If necessary, significant cultural and ethnic groups within a narrow group can be presented separately while the remaining cultural and ethnic groups within the narrow group are aggregated. The same principle can be adopted to highlight significant narrow groups within a broad group. Aggregated categories should be labelled 'Other' or 'Other (narrow group name)'.

Cultural and ethnic groups from different narrow groups should not be added together to form an aggregation that is not included in the classification structure as this corrupts the application of the classification criteria and has negative repercussions for data comparability. Similarly, narrow groups from different broad groups should not be added together.

Classification review

Scope

In 2019 the ABS conducted a limited review of the Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG). It was restricted to an examination of feedback received since the last minor review was done in 2016.

Method

The 2019 review of the ASCCEG was carried out through:

- Analysis of feedback received about the ASCCEG since 2016. This included feedback from users of the classification, whether within the ABS or in the broader community.
- Limited consultation with internal and Australian Government stakeholders.
- Research to learn more about stakeholder comments, identify appropriate terminology to be used for categories in the classification, and confirm the accuracy of code

assignments. The research included selected analysis of 2016 Australian Census of Population and Housing data.

Outcome

The outcome of the 2019 review was that one new cultural and ethnic group was added to the classification. Consequent updates were made to correspondence tables and the coding index to ensure that the new cultural and ethnic group was reflected in those products.

Cultural and ethnic group added to the classification

- Norfolk Islander (code 1105), added to capture an ancestry reported by Norfolk Island residents following Norfolk Island's inclusion in the Australian Census of Population and Housing for the first time in 2016.

Comparing current and previous editions of ASCCEG

Correspondence tables enable two-way comparison between the ASCCEG 2019 and ASCCEG 2016. They show:

- Relationships between broad groups, narrow groups, and cultural and ethnic groups in the current compared to the most recent previous edition of ASCCEG.
- Changes between the current and most recent previous edition.

These correspondence tables are available in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 of the ASCCEG data cube, accessible from the Data downloads section.

Generally, the categories in both editions of the ASCCEG relate directly to the same entity in each edition.

Data downloads

The data cube contains the 2019 ASCCEG structure, supplementary codes, and correspondence tables between the current and most recent previous edition.

Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG), 2019

[↓ Download XLS](#)
[257.5 KB]

Abbreviations

[Show all](#)

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